



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes April 23, 2025

6:00 PM

Hybrid Meeting: Zoom and in person at Town Hall Room 126

Present: Heidi Porten (chair), Kate Despres (co-chair), Bill Alstrom (clerk)

Ian Bergemann - Community Conservation Specialist

Attendees: Fran Arsenault - Acton Select Board Liaison

Acton Resident Sudhir Prabhu

Regular Business:

Heidi convened the meeting at 6:00 PM.

The hybrid meeting announcement was read in its entirety.

1. **Approval of the meeting minutes of March 25, 2025** – Kate made a motion to approve the minutes, Heidi seconded. The minutes were unanimously accepted.
2. **Concerns from the Public.** Sudhir Prabhu presented his concerns about an abutting neighbor's chickens. He complained of a rooster crowing and an event where a chicken had entered his yard and garage. Sudhir is seeking the establishment of a "chicken keeping by-law". Ian clarified that Ag Com was a platform for such discussions and would be consulted for opinions. But the actual composition of a by-law would emanate from other committees such as Planning or the Board of Health. There would also be a process of public outreach before a final submission to the Select Board – who would potentially vote that a by-law be included as a warrant at Town Meeting.

Ian will consult with his superiors as to any guidance for next steps about chicken keeping.
3. **Comprehensive Agricultural Plan Discussion** – Bill will continue to review the plan with a goal of creating more paragraph breaks to enhance readability. A more compact version of the plan will be considered once the Formal Plan is complete and approved by this commission. The goal is a simpler document which could be used to educate. Ian envisions a section on the town website with helpful photos that serves a similar purpose – explaining the Right to Farm law and the role of Ag Com.

Ian mentioned that the state of Massachusetts may redefine “farms” to include smaller properties. This could offer Chapter 61 tax status for appropriate smaller properties.

4. **Morrison Farm Update** – Members reviewed the history of last year's effort to achieve conservation protection for MF. A core continuing stumbling block has been how to handle the buildings. Fran explained the challenges involved with carving out the old house and barn and assigning it to a proposed new Historic District Corridor. An informal survey of MF active users was discussed.

The Morrison Farm discussion will resume with Ag Com’s September meeting.

5. **New Property in Consideration** – No new properties were considered. Ian discussed how the town has first right of refusal if a Chapter 61 farm is put on the market. As the state is proposing that the 5-acre requirement for Chapter 61 be eliminated, perhaps more small farming properties will consider that tax benefit.
6. **Ian will contact Ag Com members about the AB Farmer’s Market** – an opportunity to showcase and explain the mission of the Agricultural Commission and appeal for additional members. Ian will attempt to obtain keys to MF house for a quick tour by two of the Ag Com members.
7. **Next Meeting Agenda (September 23):**
 - Review and accept meeting minutes of April 23, 2025**
 - Concerns from the Public**
 - Chicken By-law discussion**
 - Comprehensive Agricultural Commission Plan – refinements**
 - Morrison Farm Update**
 - New Property Consideration**
 - Next Meeting Agenda**

Bill motioned to close the meeting at 7:07 PM. Kate seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Linked relevant documents and meeting materials can be found in the Agricultural Commission’s page on the Town website or through the following link. <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-12706>